

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
6 April 1975

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Situation in Indochina
(As of 1600 EST)
No. 4

SOUTH VIETNAM

Political Developments

1. Thieu's obvious intention to remain in power has produced mounting dissatisfaction in both military and civilian circles, but as yet there is no firm evidence of a serious move to force his ouster or resignation.

2. [redacted] may best reflect the general political situation in the country. [redacted] conceded Saturday that his efforts to persuade Thieu to step aside in favor of an "executive council" headed by General Ky had failed. Moreover, he admitted that despite what he felt was universal dissatisfaction with Thieu, the President still had the trump cards and "he is playing them cool." Some people had been arrested on vague charges of coup plotting and others had lost their draft deferments and were being sent to the front lines. The labor force, including government bureaucrats, is reluctant to speak out against Thieu in the wake of rumors that Viet Cong agents are now surfacing to spread confusion among the people. Military men are equally reluctant, fearing that any unsuccessful coup would bring disgrace to them and reprisals against their families. Religious factions, especially the Catholics, do not want to take any action that would help the Communists. Thus, [redacted] so long as Thieu retains the loyalty of a few high-level military

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officers and the police, his removal from office will not be an easy task to engineer.

Communist Reactions

3. Communist reaction to political developments in South Vietnam has focused on US support to the Thieu government; so far, there has been no reaction from either the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese to Thieu's speech. Hanoi has been preoccupied criticizing the US evacuation of Vietnamese refugees and orphans. An article in the party daily Friday called the evacuations a "shrewd and malicious plot" to force "our people to leave their native lands." Premier Pham Van Dong in a radio broadcast Sunday charged that the US evacuation plan was "abominable" and "unhealthy."

4. Viet Cong commentary has focused more on developments in the recently "liberated" areas of South Vietnam, claiming that life is "returning to normal." The Communists also claim that a political solution could be arrived at following the departure of President Thieu and members of his "clique." The Viet Cong have not identified who they would be willing to negotiate with in a new government or who comprises Thieu's clique, although at a press conference in Saigon Saturday, a Viet Cong spokesman claimed that the "number is not a big one."

Delta Action Levels Off

5. The bulk of Communist-initiated military action continues in the form of shellings of government positions in the northern and central provinces of the delta. The Binh Thuy airfield, just outside Can Tho, was hit by seven rockets last night. No heavy offensive action was mounted by either side on April 6, but the North Vietnamese 4th Division is maintaining pressure on the South Vietnamese units defending Can Tho City.

6. The 21st Division commander is following his recently-adopted tactic of maintaining a mobile blocking

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type of defense rather than committing his troops to large-scale offensive operations that could result in heavy casualties. This tactic appears to be working well so far. Government officials believe the division's blocking role is effectively keeping the Communists off balance, and this accounts for the Communists' failure thus far to launch their expected attacks against the city.

7. A slight upswing in optimism among regional staff officers rests on the substantially increased availability and effectiveness of air support. The delta is now receiving at least 60 sorties of strike aircraft daily, and government units are no longer complaining that pilots are bombing from high altitudes that preclude any degree of accuracy.

8. The regional commander has been strengthening the defenses of Moc Hoa in the northern delta and the South Vietnamese 9th Division units supported by armor and increased air support now have the military edge on the battlefield that some military leaders feel could be the first big test of the resolve of Saigon's forces in the remaining third of the country.

Status of Units Evacuated from Northern Provinces

9. The commander of the South Vietnamese Marine Division evacuated from Da Nang is now regrouping the unit at Vung Tau along the coast and has more than 5,000 marines. Of the three brigades that are being reassembled and rearmed, one is almost full strength, well-equipped, and is considered combat ready. The other two brigades are at about half strength and one of these should be operational by late next week.

10. The Marine commander has been given trucks and artillery and will soon move the operational brigade to the Marine Training Center outside Saigon for the purpose of bolstering the confidence of the population in the capital.

11. Parts of the South Vietnamese Airborne brigade that were brought out of the northern provinces have been resting and refitting at Long Binh. One battalion was sent on April 4 to reinforce government units in the Phan Rang area of Ninh Thuan Province. The government still is holding onto small enclaves at both Phan Rang and Phan Thiet, because the North Vietnamese have been slow to occupy these weakly defended areas of southern Military Region 2. There have also been some reports that the Communists have not yet moved into Nha Trang in force, but Saigon's military presence there is weak.

12. Much of the South Vietnamese 2nd Division, which fled from Quang Ngai and Quang Tin provinces in Military Region 1, is now in Binh Tuy Province. The division commander is attempting to reorganize 4,000 or so troops but has encountered difficulties. Many of the soldiers have been reluctant to turn in their weapons, and some were involved in stealing and looting in the provincial capital of Ham Tan, a seacoast city that has been deluged with military personnel and civilians arriving by boat from the northern provinces. The 2nd Division commander has managed to subdue many of the unruly troops and has placed them aboard ships for several days to allow tempers to cool, permit a screening and selection according to military unit, and preclude any serious disorders when they are shipped to various camps for reorganization into fighting units.

CAMBODIAThe Tactical Situation

1. Increased Khmer Communist attacks today forced elements of the Cambodian Army's 3rd Division to abandon the town of Thnal Totung on Route 4 west of Pochentong airport. Significant amounts of equipment were left behind and several hundred government troops are missing. Other 3rd Division units withdrew in a more orderly fashion from a position just southeast of Thnal Totung. Despite the loss of these outlying positions, most of the 3rd Division still is well dug-in along the primary defense line protecting the army's main ammunition dump near the airport and should be able to prevent any further Communist gains, at least for the next few days.

2. Insurgent forces today also kept Phnom Penh's northwestern defenses under steady pressure but were unable to make any further territorial gains. Government maintenance crews managed to repair a number of aircraft last night and the air force was able to fly more than fifty tactical missions today, most of them in support of government units north and northwest of Pochentong airport. Communist rocket and artillery attacks against the airport slackened today.

3. In the countryside, the Communists have stepped-up their attacks against the provincial capital of Kompong Speu, on Route 4 southwest of Phnom Penh, and the situation there is becoming serious. Southeast of Phnom Penh, ground attacks against the provincial capital of Prey Veng last night forced government units to abandon an outlying position. A small number of survivors from Neak Luong and Banam have begun filtering into Prey Veng and Svay Rieng--now the only two government-held towns east of the Mekong River.

Evacuation Status

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only 69 official members of the US Mission and 102 private US citizens remained in Phnom Penh. The evacuation list, however, still includes over 600 third country nationals and Cambodians. Ambassador Dean is still convinced that the situation in the capital will unravel rapidly if large numbers of government officials and Cambodian employees of the US Mission begin leaving and that the lives of any remaining US officials would be endangered. He also speculates that the relative lull in battlefield activity around the capital is ominous and that if the evacuation is not completed soon, the "final extraction will have to be carried out under hostile fire."

Political Developments

5. Acting Cambodian President Saukham Koy met with US Congressional staff members today and made an impassioned plea for supplemental aid. Koy said that a favorable vote on the aid question would buy him time to arrange what in effect would be an orderly surrender. Koy said that under present circumstances the "best feasible solution" would be for the government to give in to Sihanouk's demands and to invite the Prince back to Phnom Penh. Koy envisioned tying the "invitation" to an agreement that Communist forces would not enter Phnom Penh and would allow the continued delivery of relief supplies to the capital. If supplemental aid is not forthcoming, Koy said that the government would have no choice but to surrender unconditionally allowing insurgent forces to enter Phnom Penh. He warned the Congressional staffers that a "bloodbath" could result. Koy was undoubtedly aiming to shock his guests but his comments also indicate that government officials now realize the severity of the situation and that any hope of a compromise solution has vanished.

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